

Decentering language: displacing Englishes from the study of Englishes

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Introduction

This paper operationalizes the idea of *strategic displacement of Englishes* – or de-centering language in the study of language through the prism of Philippine English (PE) studies. Essentially, the paper proposes an approach to the study of Englishes which strategically suspends training our lens on such Englishes and, instead, examine the ‘world’ in which they are embedded. Within a broader perspective, it argues that in our desire to study language in society, we must not assume that language is central to speakers’ lives as is usually the case when we study the role of language in society. This implies substantial changes in how we frame our research questions, methodologies, analyses and conclusions. Strategic displacement of language – and more specifically Englishes in this paper -- shares similar experiences with scholars who investigated the social life of language but looked beyond language itself to make sense of how language is used (e.g., Lorente, 2017; Canieso-Doronila, 1994). In some cases, methodological adjustments had to be made, for example by letting go of set research questions and simply let issues and questions emerge from people’s everyday engagements with their own social lives (Motha, 2014; Author, 2015a).

PE is, of course, a part of a constellation of World Englishes (WE) which have emerged out of the imperial, then ‘postcolonial’, spread of English (Kachru, 1986). The paradigm of WE has had significant impact on research on English language education (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2007), politics of English (e.g., Author, 2004), second language acquisition (e.g., Bolton, 2018),

language contact (e.g., Lim, 2007), assessment (e.g., Lowenberg, 2002), among many other related fields. One key assumption of studies of the Englishes of the world is that the spread of English has led to its pluralization and localization because of the cultural mediation of the so-called ‘non-native’ speakers of English. These different Englishes are legitimate Englishes, and this has been proven by research on their structural, semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical dimensions. The Englishes of the world, in other words, have produced their own local grammar and lexicon, indicating that their speakers have taken ownership of their own use of the language (Widdowson, 1994).

By and large, however, studies on the pluralization of English have focused more on what has happened to English itself and less on the enduring social materialist conditions under which such linguistic changes have occurred. In other words, studies on World Englishes have broadly been about the ‘Englishes’ and much less about the ‘world’ or what Kandiah (1995) refers to as the “realities of the world” (p. xii) and “realities of the modern order” (p. xiv). What happens then if we reframe our study of the pluralization of English by decentering English from World Englishes? In the case of this paper, the key argument straightforward: that in the study of Philippine English, there has been an overwhelming focus on ‘English’ but also a silencing of its key modifier, ‘Philippine’. What happens to ‘English’ if we de-center it from the study of ‘Philippine English’ and, instead, begin with an unpacking of its main modifier, ‘Philippine’?

Philippine English studies

Studies on Philippine English have had a long historical trajectory, making it one of the earliest extensively researched postcolonial Englishes in the world, with Tay (1991) claiming early on

that the “Philippines has perhaps produced the most comprehensive research on an indigenized variety of English” in Southeast Asia (p. 323). I would, therefore, no longer repeat much of what has been written about it for around 50 years now – from its linguistics (Llamson, 1979; Bautista, 2000) to its politics (Gonzalez, 1976; Author, 2001, 2004); from its pragmatic and social dimensions (Gonzalez, 2004; Martin, 2014) to its pedagogical implications (Bernardo, 2011); from attitudes towards it (Bautista, 2001; Borlongan, 2009) to its nature as a contact language (Enriquez, 2012; Gonzales, 2017) – but attempt to broaden the frame through which we study it with the hope that it will surface more clearly the entanglements of different sociolinguistic, cultural and socioeconomic conditions and phenomena which generate, animate and/or saturate the possibility of a phenomenon called ‘Philippine English’. Suffice it to say that Philippine English studies for the past five decades have generated ample evidence of the patterned and socioculturally shaped use of English in the Philippines, consequently affirming the reality of the globalization/pluralization of English around the world. Thus, “Englishes, as opposed to English, are relevant to the twenty-first-century conversations of English education” (Kirkland, 2010, p. 293).

Nevertheless, the unspoken given in Philippine English studies is that either the Philippines is essentially the geographical location of English being investigated or that it is spoken by an undifferentiated group of speakers called ‘Filipinos’. Thus, Philippine English refers mainly to English in the Philippines or English spoken by Filipinos. This has led work in the area to focus mainly on its linguistic system and the pragmatic possibilities it creates for its speakers. Such work, alongside other studies in the vibrant field of World Englishes (Kachru, 1986; Bamgbose, 1998; Bolton, 2006; Platt et al., 1984), has helped legitimize local uses of English and helped Filipino speakers, especially those who use the language already with some

degree of comfort or ease, assert their ownership over the language. Such linguistic ownership early on took on an explicitly political – ‘post-colonial’ – position which Gonzalez (1976) referred to as *linguistic emancipation* with Filipinos taking “the language for their own creative uses, an emancipation which is bound to result in novelty in the creative uses of the patterning of English at the lexical and syntactic level, in addition to semantic and phonological innovation” (453). However, there is more to the modifier “Philippine” than what it currently references in the literature. It is a historically, culturally, ideologically, and socioeconomically enabled modifier, owing to the fact that the Philippines has had multiple experiences of colonization, is multilingual but whose languages are unequally distributed and valued, is globally entrenched but whose people avow strong ethnolinguistic regional loyalties, and is distinctly stratified along class lines. These intersecting social phenomena organize the network of meanings of ‘Philippine’ in Philippine English, thus if we strategically suspend talk on English(es) and train our lenses on what it is that defines and frames it, we may be able to expand or enrich our descriptions and appraisals of English and its speakers. What is the nature of Philippine English if we begin our examination of this sociolinguistic phenomenon with ‘Philippine’ rather than with ‘English’? As a matter of extension, we can also then ask about the nature of ‘World Englishes’ if we make as our central object of investigation the cultural, economic and sociopolitical constitution of ‘the world’ in which the Englishes produced and embedded.

‘Philippine’ in Philippine English

As mentioned in the earlier section, the paper approaches Philippine English through the principle of strategic displacement -- suspend talk on English and focus on articulating and

unpacking the multimeaning modifier, ‘Philippine’. Thus, the strategic displacement of English(es) from ‘Philippine English’ inevitably leads us to explicating the modifier ‘Philippine’ in terms of how it implicates the country’s multilingual landscape. To put it in another way, the privileging of ‘English’ in Philippine English displaces the centrality of multilingualism as a lens through which we should examine the role of language – any language or language variety for that matter – in society. Thus, what is meant by the principle of strategic displacement of the English language as an approach to Philippine English is de-centering the main subject of investigation and divesting oneself of the pervasive belief in the presumed or putative centrality of language (English in our case in this paper) in social life. Consequently, the question would be: what happens to ‘English’ and what could be the implications for the research and teaching of English if we operationalize such strategic displacement in our work in the pluralization of English?

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss six fundamental (but overlapping) social phenomena characterizing the Philippines which, in turn, organize the meanings with which ‘Philippine’ in Philippine English is imbued. These are: inequalities of multilingualism (Author, 2015b), strong regional ethnolinguistic loyalties (Gonzalez, 1980), enduring coloniality of Filipino experience (Schirmer & Shalom, 1987), globalized political economy and cultural dispositions (Parreñas, 2001; Lorente, 2017), and markedly class-based social structure (Anderson, 1988; Fuwa, 2006). They are mutually constitutive of each other, thus there is a need to discuss them as a coherently organized network of pervasive social conditions and phenomena which shape contemporary Filipino life.

Inequalities of ‘Philippine’ multilingualism

Just like most countries, the Philippines is typically described as a “multilingual society” (Hidalgo, 1998, p. 23), and rightly so because at least 175 indigenous languages are spoken across the archipelago (Kaufman, 2017) consisting of 7,106 islands, although only more than 200 of which are habitable. However, such a description – ‘multilingual’ -- is acutely limiting because it simply refers to an accounting of languages as spoken by different groups of speakers. More often than not, the use of ‘multilingual’ ignores the fact that various kinds of inequalities shape and imbed speakers of languages in question (Author, 2015; Mohanty, 2010). For example, by virtue of their relationship with their speakers, some languages are more powerful than others, thus these powerful languages are not only imbued with positive values and accorded higher prestige by society, but they are also institutionally legitimized and privileged either as Medium-of-Instruction (MOI) or as languages of work. Thus, behind the façade of linguistic diversity is a hierarchy of languages. In the case of the Philippines, the English language reigns supreme, not because it is pervasively used in everyday communication (because it is not), but because it is the most powerful, both symbolically and materially. Speakers of the language – especially those who speak the standard variety of Philippine English – are viewed as educated, trustworthy and credible (Borlongan, 2009), and are the ones preferred in high-paying jobs (Salonga, 2015).

The rapid spread of the national language – Tagalog-based Filipino – has also contributed to the perpetuation of inequalities of multilingualism in the Philippines. The language was originally envisioned as an anti-colonial language, a symbol of Filipino’s resistance to the dominance of colonially-induced structures and ideologies which have governed Filipinos’ everyday life and socioeconomic and political affairs since the Philippine-American War of

1899-1902. English, according to famed Filipino historian Renato Constantino (1970), “became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen” (p. 432), thus a local language had to be established as a national language as a way to counter the dominance of English in the country.¹ Tagalog-based Filipino, however, has taken on a sweeping discursive role as *the* language of resistance, thus further diminishing the status of all other Philippine languages most of whom are spoken as mother tongues by Filipinos outside Manila and its neighboring provinces which constitute the Tagalog region (Author & collaborator, 2014). This explains why in the history of language policy-making and debates in the country, ethnolinguistic regional animosity – or what Hidalgo (1998) describes as “regional recalcitrance” or “regional ethnocentrism” (p. 23) -- has further animated the problem of language in the country, with many speakers of other mother tongues strongly opposed to the institutionalization of Tagalog-based Filipino as either the national language or as an MOI. Such regional animosity is not limited to language alone; in fact, it is symptomatic of a much broader inter-regional politics that has saturated national politics for some time now because of the contention that the unequal distribution of political power and economic resources in the country is due mainly to the dominance of ‘Imperial Manila’ or the prevalence of ‘Tagalog imperialism’ (Kaufman, 2017, p. 169).

Enduring colonialism and the making of globally competitive Filipinos

Thus, inequalities of multilingualism demonstrate how linguistic hierarchies are, in fact, embedded in larger social forms of inequalities which are colonially-, class-, and ethnolinguistically-shaped. When the Philippines achieved political independence from the

United States in 1946 after around 50 years of being under colonial rule, such independence was by and large a nominal one because postcolonial economic and political affairs continued to be regulated by colonial templates of thinking and rule, except that this time American rule was more indirect than direct. This is a condition referred to as *coloniality*: “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration” (Maldonado-Torres, 2010, p. 97). A classic example of these from the Philippines was the largely unchanged structure and content of the educational system, reconfigured to some extent in 1974 when the country experimented on a bilingual form of education but trappings of coloniality could clearly be gleaned through the continuing privileging of English as the MOI in science and mathematics. Thus, “the early postwar Filipino educational thinking was almost a carbon copy of the American colonial position on all issues” (Foley, 1978, p. 69). Another example were constitutional provisions which allowed Americans (even after they turned over official governance of the country to Filipinos) to continue owning land and operate businesses in the Philippines (Pomeroy, 1970; Schirmer & Shalom, 1987).

All this was compounded by the emergence in the 1950s of what are referred to as Bretton Woods international economic institutions such as the ‘twins’ (Bello, 2005) World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Bank (IMF) for the purpose of spearheading the economic rehabilitation of the world which was then ravaged by World War II. As is well-known by now (Schirmer & Shalom, 1987; Bello, 2009), these US- and Europe-led institutions were responsible for radically altering the economic infrastructures of developing countries in need of cash inflow for ‘development’ projects. Economic interventionism intensified in the 1980s when the country was forced to accept *structural adjustment* reforms as dictated by the IMF and WB in exchange

for bailout and payment strategies because of the country's massive external debts (Bello, 2009). Such reforms involved cutting back on spending on basic social services such as education, health care and transportation, along with the privatization of government assets and deregulation of prices of basic commodities such as oil, water, gas and rice, all purportedly to maximize efficiency, minimize wastefulness of resources and increase productivity. Consequently, as the power of the state to intervene in economic affairs slowly diminished (or was curtailed), it became increasingly clear as well that 'the market' – which was supposed to operate on its own and correct by itself – was in fact controlled by inter-state agencies such as the WB and IMF whose interests they protect(ed) were primarily those of companies and institutions in developed countries such as the United States (Broad, Cavanagh & Bello, 1990). In other words, the structural adjustment policies imposed upon the Philippines reinforced IMF's "grip on Philippine underdevelopment" (Lindio-McGovern, 2003, p. 519). More than three decades ago, WB would categorically claim that structural adjustment policies worked (Broad, Cavanagh & Bello, 1990, p. 144), but recently it has admitted – albeit in very subtle terms -- to the 'inadequacy' of such prescriptions to alleviate the lives of people in developing countries (Bello, 2005; Mkandawire & Soludo, 1998, p. xi). These prescriptions in fact brought these countries into further subservience to the economic and political dictates of powerful capitalist nations. Thus, with the Philippines' perpetual quest for 'global competitiveness' (Bernardo, 2008; Lorente, 2017), its role in the global market from the 1970s has not been as engine or controller of globalization but as "a subordinated supplier of mobile, cheap labor" (Lindio-McGovern, 2003, p. 525) to industrialized countries, resulting in Filipinos becoming 'servants of globalization' (Parreñas, 2001), deploying 'scripts of servitude' (Lorente, 2017) to find work elsewhere under harsh living or working conditions. In this light, when we speak of globalization

in the Philippines, it is not possible (and in fact, irresponsible) to ignore the export of labor as one of its defining features, “mainly in response to the debt crisis brought about largely by the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) structural adjustment policies” (Lindio-McGovern, 2003, p. 513).

Therefore, what we see in ‘Philippine’ is how colonial practices and structures of relations coalesce with newer forms of economic and political control through the neoliberal infrastructures of the global market. In this sense, the enduring coloniality of Filipino life is real, especially because our economic and cultural dispositions are to a large extent oriented towards harnessing our bodies – including our ways of speaking -- to become ‘globally competitive’. The implication here for Philippine English studies is that if we shield ‘English’ from its materialist social embeddedness central to which is the enduring coloniality of conditions within which English is supposedly fractured, mangled and/or transformed by Filipino speakers, we lose sight of the fact that the pluralization of English cannot naively be celebrated as a triumph of the country’s speakers over the English language. Having colonized the English language – as Filipino poet Gemino Abad famously pronounced (Abad, 1997) – does not mean its speakers have been freed from conditions of coloniality. As we will see in the following section, English is deeply enmeshed in class-based inequalities in the country.

The prevalence of class

When the discourse of ‘being globally competitive’ is deployed to justify particular language or language-in-education policies, what is hidden from the discourse is the fact that rush towards global competitiveness is not an egalitarian, equalizing undertaking. Competition in the market

is fierce and unequal. On the one hand, the logic of the market is such that there are niched places of work requiring different skills and competencies but, on the other hand, mastery of highly marketable skills and competences is only available largely through either quality education or favorable home and social environments. This explains why – to give one example - - the social structure of Filipino OFWs (or Overseas Foreign Workers) is one that reflects the class-based social structure back in the Philippines (Ong & Cabañes, 2011; Parreñas, 2001; Johnson, 2010; Lindio-McGovern, 2003). A small group of Filipino OFWs or elite migrants are products of elite Philippine universities as well, most of whom come from well-to-do and highly educated families in the first place. Investigating one particular group of such elite Filipinos in London, Ong & Cabañes (2011) found that “their actual physical encounters with fellow Filipinos in public political events is limited” (p. 198), and whose “practices of engaging with homeland political *issues* while disengaging with ‘other’ Filipino *people* are embedded in, and potentially amplify, long-existing class divides in Philippine society” (p. 200, italics as original). They too look down on language or communicative practices associated with lower-income Filipinos workers, thus reflective of class conflict among Filipinos (Tolentino, 2010; see Reyes, 2017, for a critical discussion on Taglish as an index of coloniality, race and class in the Philippines). On the other hand, domestic helpers and other lowly-paid Filipinos abroad come from much less ideal educational and home environments (Lindio-McGovern, 2003).

The case of the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines – the second largest source of investment for the Philippines today – mirrors a similar class-driven pattern: only 3-4 of 100 applicants make it (Forey & Lockwood, 2007; Salonga, 2016), and those who make it come from relatively privileged backgrounds compared to the great majority of applicants who do not make the cut. The latter are blamed for their sub-standard education,

including either their lack of proficiency in English or their use of ‘undesirable’ Englishes because of ‘deficient’ language learning opportunities at home (Salonga, 2010; Salonga, 2015; Author & collaborator, 2016). In the words of Salonga (2015), “only particular kinds of people, usually those who are privileged...can take part in what the industry has to offer” (p. 139).

The specific examples of class-based issues in the Philippines in this section broadly follow the class-shaped contours of the politics of language in the country, except that these contours historically have been overshadowed by ethnolinguistically-motivated positions and language choices. When the Philippines ‘chose’ Tagalog as the national language in 1937 (still under American colonial rule) over other Philippine languages, especially Cebuano which was then spoken by a more numerically larger group of speakers, speakers of other Philippine languages – again especially Cebuano – have persistently resisted the imposition of Tagalog as the national language (Gonzalez, 1980). Such resistance would take on various forms and practices, including the refusal to sing the national language and instead sing it in the English language, the vigorous promotion of literature in the vernacular languages and, simply, using English rather than Tagalog in everyday conversation. Of course, the national language issue has also been exploited for political reasons by local (non-Tagalog) politicians who would rehearse arguments against Tagalog as a threat to regional cultures and languages. However, as some scholars have argued, the politics of language in the Philippines has always been centrally class-driven, with regional calls to resist the national language and, instead, promote the use of English, a case of social elite rivalries, rather than ethnolinguistic/regional differences. The English-speaking regional elites, in resisting Tagalog, were engaged in such a resistance because the rise of the national language would give Tagalog-speaking elites an edge over other regional elites in terms of access to some of society’s material and symbolic goods.

From Philippine English to Unequal Philippine Englishes

What then becomes of ‘English’ in Philippine English if we use a much broader lens through which we can describe, interpret and evaluate its use in the country? We have expounded above that the modifier ‘Philippine’ is semantically constituted by various but interlaying meanings drawn from the country’s complex historical, sociopolitical and socioeconomic make up. *Philippine* English is English that is embedded in and saturated by inequalities of multilingualism embedded in colonially-induced and class-shaped structures of social relations. Therefore, it is clear that the dominant construct of ‘Philippine English’ as a geographical marker or a referent to an undifferentiated group of speakers of the language is acutely narrow; there is more to Philippine English than simply spoken in the Philippines or spoken by Filipinos. Recently, there have been attempts to expand the conceptual coverage of Philippine English, for example by surfacing the plurality of English language use in the country along class and ethnolinguistic lines (Martin, 2014; Gonzales, 2017; Author, 2004), and this is a welcome development as it recognizes the incontrovertible diversity of the language. However, more work is needed to consolidate all possible considerations to reconceptualize ‘Philippine English’ as an inclusive but interrogative construct. Thus, ‘Philippine English’ – to be more appropriate and accurate in describing and interrogating the nature of English in the Philippines – would have to be reconceptualized as unequal Englishes, or more specifically *unequal Philippine Englishes*.

First of all, English in the Philippines is not and has never been a monolithic variety of English. Because its use is class-inflected and ethnolinguistically-marked, among other social

factors, Filipinos speak different Philippine Englishes. The trouble with much work on Philippine English, claims Gonzales (2017), is that English spoken in Manila (the national capital) takes up the bulk of data used to describe English in the country which scholars then describe as 'Philippine English'. Thus, "researchers attempting to acknowledge existing studies utilizing ICE-PHⁱⁱ as their primary data source may want to relabel 'Philippine English' data as 'Manila English' data" (p. 91). English in Manila is simply not interchangeable with English in the Philippines. Martin (2014) also interrogates the homogenizing studies of Philippine English but through a different lens: "the variety is widely used only among the educated class" (p. 81). English spoken by the 'educated class' is not representative of the prevalent use of English in the Philippines, a point acknowledged by Sibayan & Gonzalez (1996) when they alerted us to five possible class-based varieties of Philippine English but only a small elite group of speakers uses the 'educated' variety. Author (2004) articulated the same view about the lens used to describe 'Philippine English' and called for a broader view of its use as a plural language through a study of the country's "marginalized varieties" (p. 55). These are the varieties spoken by the country's "vast majority" (Sibayan & Gonzalez, 1996, p. 163). The same point was articulated by Parakrama (1995) more than twenty years ago in relation to World Englishes studies when he referred to "the unquestioned paradigm of the 'educated standard' (p. xii).

Nevertheless, while scholars rightly expose the homogenizing tendencies of Philippine English studies, which thus should be recognized as one right way forward in the scholarship, the work on the diversity of Englishes is largely oriented towards describing these various potential Philippine Englishes in decontextualized ways. That is, the approach taken is largely descriptive, assumes a static view of language use, and hardly takes the view that the varieties being described are implicated in the lives of their speakers. In other words, behind the façade of a

diversity of Philippine Englishes are their speakers who, depending on their social positioning, deploy particular varieties of Philippine English which sustain either their privileged or marginalized status in society. Philippine Englishes – or any other English for that matter – cannot simply be treated as a linguistic phenomenon which must be differentiated according to their unique structural or semantic features. A critical sociolinguistics of Philippine Englishes assumes that these Englishes are inextricably embedded in the lives of their speakers – in colonially- and class-induced social relations with which inequalities of multilingualism are intertwined -- thus these Englishes are not mere linguistic construction but, more importantly, historical and sociocultural construction as well. To put it in another way, the various Philippine Englishes are *lived* trajectories of individual Filipino speakers. Whereas Constantino (1970) referred to English as a wedge created between Filipino elites and the Filipino masses, this time Filipinos of various social classes and ethnolinguistic affiliations – with differentiated access to English which remains the most powerful language in the country – generate different Englishes which participate in the continuing practices of stratification and division in Philippine society.

In other words, the key point to make is the centrality of inequality in the production of Philippine Englishes – we cannot simply make a claim in terms of the plurality and distribution of Philippine Englishes. More importantly, such Englishes are unequal and unequally distributed as well. Bautista (2001) already made this point quite strongly almost two decades ago: “The fact is that for poorly educated Filipinos, English will remain a foreign language, inadequately learned, incorrectly used, ‘wrong’” (p. 31). The use of one over another – a choice that is largely socially determined – has material consequences in the life of the speaker. Thus, while there has been typically no resistance to the claim that proficiency in English is needed for an individual to become competitive in the job market or aim for social mobility, what is not openly admitted or

highlighted is the fact that different family and social backgrounds, as well as differentiated access to quality education, frame any Filipino's learning of the most desired kind of English language proficiency, or what Bautista (2000) describes as "the standard of standards" (p. 17) in English in the Philippines. In other words, everyone endorses English but not everyone benefits from it because the English one learns differs from that of others, and such differences are framed in unequal terms.

We can recall one *recent* classic case of unequal Englishes in the country. A beauty queen, Janina San Miguel, daughter of a jeepney driver and a laundrywoman, chose to speak in English during the interview portion of a Miss Philippines competition. She eventually won one of the coveted crowns (due mainly to her performance in earlier categories), but what came after her allegedly non-standard, embarrassing use of English was nothing short of a national political disaster. From the perspective of the national collective, Janina San Miguel fell short of the ideal proficiency in English, and thus became the poster girl for what was wrong with Philippine education (Author, 2014). It was one of the most pilloried and mocked displays of English language use in the country, leading one senior legislator in the Philippine Congress (who was then the main proponent of the return of the English-only policy in education) to say that such a "sensational failure" was "tormenting to watch" (*Miss Philippines World's ear-splitting English*, 2008). San Miguel eventually relinquished her crown in the months following the controversy. Such an instantiation of unequal Englishes is replicated in the everyday and working lives of Filipinos, for example in the call center industry where various kinds of Englishes help determine individual workers' chances of landing a job, or position them vis-à-vis their customers most of whom are speakers of American English (Salonga, 2010; Salonga, 2015; Author & collaborator, 2016); or in Philippine classrooms where opportunities for the learning of

‘good’ English are largely inaccessible to teachers and pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged and more rural educational environments (Martin, 2010). In these examples, we find that particular uses of English have material consequences for their speakers and these are because the speakers are located in a complex nexus of historical, socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions which shape the way they speak, including the way they learn and use English.

Thus, when we investigate unequal Englishes in the country (for recent studies on unequal Englishes in other contexts, see Lee & Jenks, 2018; Dovchin et al., 2016; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2018), we do not merely describe their structural or semantic features, but also attempt to find out what these Philippine Englishes *do* to their speakers and their speakers’ interlocutors – and why (Salonga, 2015; Author & collaborator, 2016). This is what Pennycook refers to as the need to examine the “effects” (1994/2017, p. ix) of unequal Englishes on people’s lives. Therefore, recasting the study of Philippine Englishes along the lines of historically- and socially-constructed inequalities will necessarily retrain our focus on the speakers of these Englishes. We begin to describe and interrogate their lives and seek to understand why they speak the way they speak. The structures and meanings of Philippine Englishes, on the one hand, as well as the life trajectories of their speakers, on the other hand, are not separate objects of investigation but are, in fact, interlinked historical and social phenomena which must be examined singularly in order to arrive at a fuller, more coherent understanding of English in the Philippines.

Conclusion

How did we arrive at a reconceptualized study of English in the Philippines in terms of *unequal Philippine Englishes*? It is through our attempt at the strategic displacement of English(es) from ‘Philippine English’ and, instead, training our lenses on the modifier, ‘Philippine’, the argument being that ‘English’ cannot simply be devoid of its material and symbolic embeddedness in society. In the process of unpacking and examining the multilayered meanings of ‘Philippine’, we have identified several socioeconomic, sociopolitical, cultural and historical accounts of Philippine society. These accounts are consolidated into three key dimensions:

1. Inequalities of ‘Philippine’ multilingualism
2. Enduring colonialism and the making of globally competitive Filipinos
3. The prevalence of social class

If we begin our examination of Philippine English by first locating it within its social milieu, we generate a view of English in the country as plural, thus Philippine Englishes which are distributed as *unequal Philippine Englishes*, which therefore have material and symbolic “effects” on their speakers. We see here that in the strategic displacement of English in Philippine English, we actually reaffirm the significance of the study of English, except that it is no longer a language that simply demands linguistic and semantic description but, more importantly, a language that demands critical scrutiny because it implicates and is implicated in structures of power and inequality in society. *Unequal Philippine Englishes*, in other words, are intricately interwoven with the lives of their speakers, many of whom – in fact, most of whom (see Sibayan & Gonzalez, 1996; Lorente, 2017, Salonga, 2010) – speak the kinds of Philippine Englishes which do not live up to the ideal – thus, desirable – standard of English that brings

forth material and symbolic benefits. It may be argued that the general notion of *Unequal Englishes* recentralizes English, thus it defeats the purpose of engaging in strategic displacement of English(es). In fact, the purpose of strategic displacement is precisely to help us take a fresh lens through which we can see and examine the machinations of English language use in specific contexts. It does not invalidate or ignore the possibility of unequal distribution of linguistic and material resources in society. Instead, it helps us understand better how the Janina San Miguel phenomenon described above remains an English problem which intersects with all other social, ideological, political and cultural problems in society.

“It is a pity,” argue Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan (2017), “that so much work has focused on putative varieties of English from a world Englishes perspective, when what we really need to address are the questions of unequal Englishes” (p. xiv). This paper in essence works broadly within this need to address questions of unequal Englishes but what we have done is to suggest a way to articulate such a need through the strategic displacement of English(es) from the study of Philippine English, one of the most researched in the World Englishes paradigm. We have for at least four decades now extensively examined the linguistic and cultural impact of the global spread of English, and indeed we owe much to *World Englishes* for demolishing the (unfounded) belief that there is only one proper way to use English, and it is through the use of the standard variety spoken by the so-called traditional ‘native speakers’ of the language. But the globalization of English has also brought forth uneven benefits to speakers of its language around the world. As I articulated in a paper several years ago, “In our desire to celebrate the Englishes of the world – mangled, purged and transformed through postcolonial desires – purportedly fracturing our colonial consciousness and shaking the grounds of political and cultural dependence, we forgot ‘the world’” (Author, 2001, p. 93).

In the same way that we should not forget the ‘Philippine’ in Philippine English through *unequal Philippine Englishes*, we should also not forget the ‘world’ in World Englishes. Now is the time to operationalize strategic displacement of English(es) in order to begin to uncover, unpack and transform the world’s unequal Englishes.

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ⁱ There is no space in this paper for a comprehensive discussion of the rise of Tagalog – later renamed as Filipino -- as the national language of the Philippines, but much has been written about this topic. See Gonzalez (1980), Tinio (2009) and Author and Collaborator (2014).

ⁱⁱ International Corpus of English -- Philippines